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Stop legal harassment of tobacco companies, Libertarian Party tells puritanical politicians

The government should end its "legal extortion" against Liggett

WASHINGTON, DC — **Politicians, stop bullying tobacco companies!**

So says the one political party that's never accepted a single penny from the tobacco lobby.

"Politicians should end their campaign of legal harassment against Liggett and other tobacco companies," said Steve Dasbach, Libertarian Party chairman. "Leave Liggett alone to sell their cigarettes — a legal product that is popular with tens of millions of consumers."

Has the Libertarian Party sold out to Big Tobacco?

"No — we've never taken a penny from the tobacco industry," said Dasbach. "But we'll staunchly defend their right to sell their products without harassment from politicians."

Dasbach's comments came after the Liggett Group Inc., the nation's fifth-largest tobacco manufacturer, agreed last week to turn "state's evidence" against the tobacco industry. Following a lengthy legal struggle against Justice Department prosecutors and 22 state attorneys general, Liggett agreed to pay the government 25% of its profits for 25 years.

"It's extortion, plain and simple," said Dasbach. "The government is extorting millions of dollars from this company — simply because politicians don't approve of cigarettes."

But aren't cigarettes dangerous? "Of course cigarettes are dangerous — and every American has known that for more than 30 years," said Dasbach. "But it's up to individuals to weigh the risks of smoking. Americans have done exactly that, and millions have quit. However, to the annoyance of the politicians, many adults continue to use this legal product."

"Since it's politically unpopular to attack tens of millions of smokers, politicians are picking on an easier target — the tobacco companies. And, in the process, they're escalating the War on Tobacco to absurd proportions," he said. For example, the Drug Enforcement Agency refers to tobacco as a "gateway drug" that will lead children to cocaine and heroin.

The War on Tobacco will continue as long as politicians see cigarette companies as a bottomless source of money, Dasbach predicted. How can we stop this cycle of government extortion? By getting voters to force politicians to leave the tobacco companies alone, he said.

"The real threat to our lives and freedom comes not from tobacco companies selling legal products to eager consumers, but from the abuse of government power," said Dasbach. "Every American could breathe a little easier if the government ended its campaign of harassment against the tobacco industry — and against Americans who choose to smoke."

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